

Cheryl (Perry) League
Third World Women's Alliance- West Coast
17 June 1998

Discussion about where she works: for Oakland Port (quasi-public agency)

K: Okay, I have my questions here. The first thing I wanted to ask you about was your activism before the Third World Women's Alliance, what you were involved in.

Cheryl Perry League: Uh---more, basically, lemme think real hard about that. Before the Third World Women's Alliance I would say, you would young, woman active with the---an African American male sorority. I mean, fraternity. What am I thinking here? The Kappa Alpha Psi?

K: Okay.

Cheryl Perry League: I spent a lot of my time with them. We would have events, we would organize things. It was more social. I was in my 20s at the time.

K: Was that in college or was that after college?

Cheryl Perry League: Well, see I have a very interesting experience. I went to college at night. I didn't complete my education during the day. And pretty much what happened is when I came out of high school I went to work as a telephone operator. And because they were trying to integrate the Catholic schools, many of us who all went to Catholic schools got teaching jobs. So I was teaching school at nineteen.

K: Oh. Wow. Okay.

Cheryl Perry League: And went to school, I think I may have had twelve units. But they were under so much pressure to integrate the Archdiocese that I got pulled into the---at nineteen teaching the second grade. You know what I mean, it's like all of a sudden I've become an aspiring professional at nineteen.

K: Right. So what would you say precipitated your political involvement with the Third World Women's Alliance?

Cheryl Perry League: With the Third World Women's Alliance?

K: Uh-huh.

Cheryl Perry League: It was personal. Many of the women had just returned from Cuba. I had someone very close to me, who I was very concerned about, who had just gone. And I had gone to a demonstration in Harlem. Am I talking too fast?

K: No.

Cheryl Perry League: I went to a demonstration in Harlem and at that demonstration I had heard that there were a number of women who had just come back from Cuba. And because of this particular friend of mine, I went up to them and asked them about the person. It wasn't at all about the demonstration. And that's when they told me about it and they began to say, "How would you like to come to a meeting?" I said, "Sure, why not?" So I met the women of the Alliance in the demonstration.

K: Okay.

Cheryl Perry League: My interest was solely personal.

K: So, did the women go with the Venceremos Brigade?

Cheryl Perry League: They had just come back from the Venceremos Brigade, with the third Brigade.

K: So, you went to the Third World Women's Alliance in New York. Do you remember when that was?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, I do. Let's see. '70.

K: Do you remember the names of any of the women who were there off-hand?

Cheryl Perry League: Uh---Keisha. I can't remember Keisha's---

K: Was it Shakur?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, Keisha Shakur. Fran Beal was there. And those are the two I think I can most--- and a woman named Barbara, but she has another name now, too. She lives in the Caribbean somewhere.

K: Okay. So what do you recall doing with the organization in New York?

Cheryl Perry League: She changed her name to Yemaya.

K: Okay.

Cheryl Perry League: And Fran may know where Yemaya is. I know she's in the Caribbean with lots of kids, I hear.

K: Okay. So do you recall what sorts of activities you participated in in New York?

Cheryl Perry League: Pretty much what we did--- because I became involved when Angela was arrested in New York City and we all went down to the jail where she was being held and held a demonstration [AYD talks about this in her book]. So, I participated in that kind of thing---demonstration.

I participated in meetings where we were reading Mao Tse Tung [laughter]. And James Forman was there. He gave me my first Red Book, as a matter of fact. He was teaching us about Marx and Lenin. And so there were political education classes, there were demonstrations, and we also had meetings---what we called consciousness-raising sessions. And then we did International Women's Day kind of things. And we produced a newspaper called *Triple Jeopardy*.

K: Right. Do you happen to have any copies of the newspaper? I've been able to find one.

Cheryl Perry League: Isn't that awful. I have no idea where that stuff is.

K: How do you recall the organization being structured?

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, it was just---I would say twelve women. I'm gonna use that as a number. I think they had a leadership body, but it wasn't that structured, you know? All of us would meet together.

K: So was it usually twelve women regularly at the meetings?

Cheryl Perry League: I would say so.

K: Were there monthly meetings or weekly?

Cheryl Perry League: Say monthly. I mean, they could have been weekly. I don't remember. Twenty-eight years ago.

K: Yeah. So how did the organization---I mean, I know you brought the organization to the West Coast, but how did that transpire?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, pretty much I was moving to the West Coast after I went to Cuba. I went on the fourth Brigade and after the fourth Brigade I met a lot of folks in California---and one who ended up being my husband. I moved out here and before I left I said, "Look, I'm going to California. Why don't we do this?" And, so, basically, I came out and started the Third World Women's Alliance out here.

K: Do you remember what year that was?

Cheryl Perry League: '71.

K: And as far as communication with the East Coast: was there a lot of communication?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, phone. A lot of phone. Things back and forth in the mail.

K: So was there an effort to coordinate events?

Cheryl Perry League: Not much. Pretty much I was on my own doing this.

K: So would you call yourself the main organizer on the West Coast for the duration?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, I founded the organization.

K: What events stand out for you from your time with Third World Women's Alliance?

Cheryl Perry League: On the West Coast?

K: Uh-huh.

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, yeah. The International Women's Day Celebration and also we had a project---I think that stands out the most. The International Women's Day Celebrations were very popular.

K: So what was involved with that?

Cheryl Perry League: We would bring women of all races together. Initially it was just women of color. And we would produce these incredible programs and we would have very sophisticated child care available. And I feel that was our biggest contribution to the West Coast.

But, the other contribution, which is, not event-oriented, but is just the relationships that were developed with other women of color. When I came out people were involved in their own organizations based on their ethnicity. So, I mean, communicating about the importance of women of color coming together. We were all---we were bringing Asian and Hispanic and Black women who never spent any kind of time together 'cause we all come from different communities. So that was a major breakthrough, I feel.

K: So was it more along the lines of coalition work or bringing women into the Third World Women's Alliance?

Cheryl Perry League: Initially, I started out by myself in, what I called, consciousness-raising sessions. So we actually had meetings to talk about different liberation struggles. Then we had meetings to talk about how to chair a meeting, how to write---you know, do leaflets, how to go before a group. So, on one hand, it was, you know, really understanding the liberation struggle and, on the other hand, it was really actually the political development of women to participate in the political process.

> leadership
devel.

And the other thing I'm most proud of is we had something called, "Por Los Ninos" and this was 24-hours, seven days a week child care.

K: Wow!

Cheryl Perry League: And that, in other words, that was past the Third World Women's Alliance. That was when we became the Alliance Against Women's Oppression.

K: Por Los Ninos was?

Cheryl Perry League: Right. They kind of link because the same people are involved except we included white women at that point.

K: Oh, I didn't know that.

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, but Third World Women's Alliance, I think the contributions were our International Women's Day Celebration where, you know, we were bringing all kinds of women together to work on it and move it forward. And it even became a coalition between the Black Panther Party, the Third World Women's Alliance, and the Filipino organization---gee, I can't remember it right now. There was an emerging organization of Filipino's who were very progressive. So, it was like a coalition between the three of us. So the events would always be at the Panther School. You see what I'm saying? In other words, everybody got all in the middle of this thing.

So it was pretty good. It served as a real organizing tool for other women to participate. In that sense it was good.

K: So were the programs for International Women's Day educational or cultural?

Cheryl Perry League: All of that. We would have keynote speakers, we would have cultural presentations. I mean, it was really very well done.

K: And then it was probably free or low-cost?

Cheryl Perry League: I don't think we charged anything. And then we would have food after it that would be from everywhere.

K: Always a draw.

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah.

K: Let's see. Do you recall any ideological disputes within the organization?

Cheryl Perry League: Only when we transformed to include women who were white.

K: Can you talk some about what happened with that?

Cheryl Perry League: I mean, it was like---you know, it's like any other organization. You really get a good comfort zone. Just to overcome Asian and Black and Hispanic women coming together, you know what I mean? And even though there wasn't that much ideological differences, but culturally we were very different, but we overcame that through years and years of working together. So the notion of bringing white women into the group really caused a lot of ideological issues. And so some of us went on and others went and did other things.

* decline
white
women

K: But, effectively, the Third World Women's Alliance ended at that point.

Cheryl Perry League: Exactly.

K: Do you remember what year that was?

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, I'm gonna say around the Bakke decision. A few years---maybe it was like '80. You know, either late, late '70s or early, early '80s.

K: So, how do you think the Third World Women's Alliance was viewed by other organizations?

Cheryl Perry League: Very positive. The only problem is we only came out of the woodwork once a year to do International Women's Day.

K: Okay. So, otherwise, it was the political education and development.

Cheryl Perry League: Right. Which was mainly those of us who were a part of that. So we didn't kind of had any mass organization with lots of things going on.

K: Do you recall any other organizations you worked with besides the Black Panther Party and the Filipino organization?

Cheryl Perry League: Yes, the Venceremos Brigade.

K: Okay. This is sort of just a little technical question: do you remember how often the Alliance met on the West Coast?

Cheryl Perry League: How often we met?

K: Yeah.

Cheryl Perry League: I guess during International Women's Day it was, like, two or three times a week in preparation for that. But regularly I would say maybe every other week or maybe once a week. That was possible---once a week.

K: And did you have an office to meet in?

Cheryl Perry League: Each others homes until the Alliance Against Women's Oppression. The Alliance Against Women's Oppression we actually had an office in the Women's Building in San Francisco.

K: Okay. And, let's see. One thing that some people have mentioned about the Third World Women's Alliance was sort of like a lesbian purging or a lot of lesbians left the group because there was some disagreement there around issues of homophobia and heterosexism. Do you recall that?

Cheryl Perry League: I wasn't involved at that time.

K: Was this after you left the organization?

Cheryl Perry League: I never heard that.

K: Oh, okay. Do you know Paris Williams?

Cheryl Perry League: Yes, I do. She wasn't in the Alliance. She was in the Communist Party.

K: Okay. Hm. Let me think. Well, Linda Burham mentions it to.

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah, maybe she knows something I don't know. I was not familiar with that.

K: Okay. Were you aware of any other Black women's organizations that were active around the same time period?

Cheryl Perry League: They were active, but I wasn't familiar with them until much, much later.

K: And do you recall having any adversaries?

Cheryl Perry League: Not that I can think of.

K: No suspected sort of COINTELPRO activity?

Cheryl Perry League: No, I can't. I don't know.

K: Or even, like, disrupt---people who were disrupting things either from socialist organizations or communist organizations?

Cheryl Perry League: I mean, they were around, but they were not in the Alliance. We did not have those folks in the organization.

K: Okay. So they didn't try to disrupt things.

Cheryl Perry League: That we were aware of. The Trotskyites. The Marxist-Leninist Formation. But none of them became members of the Alliance. Or ties were more with women who had seen how to get close the Venceremos Brigade. Those are the women who tend to lean towards us, but not the Marxist-Leninist Formation.

K: Okay. So, overall, what do you think the Third World Women's Alliance accomplished?

Cheryl Perry League: Well, I think we---through certainly our *Triple Jeopardy* we accomplished the---well, really it was more of a challenge in establishing unity among other women who are from diverse backgrounds and actually formulating---I mean, basically, unify around some goals and objectives. I think that's major. When you think about the time period, I mean, it's like in the late '60s, early '70s and none of us knew much about each others lives or communities except for our own stereotypes. So that, to me, is a very significant contribution, in that we concentrate on our commonality and not necessarily that they were from Peru or I was from New York and grew up in Harlem. Or someone was Chinese. We concentrated on our oppression as women as the rallying point for our efforts to organize.

K: Okay. And, let's see. So the organization didn't fold, but I want to make sure I have the succession of events correct.

Cheryl Perry League: I don't know about New York 'cause see I left.

K: Right. You joined in New York in 1970 and moved to the west coast in '71.

Cheryl Perry League: Now, there's a whole lot of illogical stuff flying around in New York.

K: Can you talk some about that?

Cheryl Perry League: I can't remember the source of it. I flew out one day to be part of some discussions and I think they were talking about disbanding. But, basically, I only stayed in New York a day and I went back to California because I had already established a network, a base, and organizing life so it really didn't matter to me whether or not they existed.

folding of
NYC
mtg.

K: I think that was pretty clear that they folded way before.

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, yeah. We didn't fold. We carried on.

K: And then when was the shift from the Third World Women's Alliance to the Alliance Against Women's Oppression? You said that was around the late 1970s, 1980s—

Cheryl Perry League: Okay, this is where Linda would probably have a good handle because even though I carried on with people, my leadership changed in the organization and I was more, let's call it, not necessarily periphery, but between the leadership and the periphery. What had happened is I had—you know, Third World Women's Alliance is my baby [laughter]. And so as it started to make the transition, I was having a hard time letting go. This is more personal than political. And as a result of that, people felt that I could not lead in the new organization. And, so, I didn't lead in the Alliance Against Women's Oppression, but continued to play a role.

transition
to AAWO

K: Who did lead in the Alliance Against Women's Oppression?

Cheryl Perry League: I would say Linda. So, I dropped out—not drop out, but my knowledge around the internal workings of Alliance Against Women's Oppression and all that, I have blocked it out. And I think was because, you know, I'm still fairly young. You know, not really—not able to—how do you say objectify my feelings about not being in the leadership, so pretty much I pulled back even though I still stayed active. And then I just sort of moved myself in the direction where I became very active in the, if you will, the more professional black community—towards my roots in New York, when you think about it. And slowly over time just moved in those circles and slowly moved away from the Alliance Against Women's Oppression.

K: So, it wasn't a very clear cut, like, one day you said, "I'm not a member of the Alliance." You just sort of phased yourself out of it?

Cheryl Perry League: Yeah. So it's pretty much—I was not in the leadership so I attended the meetings, I did different things, but it wasn't like my heart was in it in the same way as with the Third World Women's Alliance. So when it comes to AAWO I have to shut off because I think I blocked out that period for myself.

K: So, do you recall at all—besides having white women in the organization—how it was different from the Third World Women's Alliance?

Cheryl Perry League: Like I said, I tuned out. And it was, again, being fairly young. You know, it's one of those things. I started the organization. Women who are politically active now, I remember bringing them in. So it was all that stuff. I was unable to objectify—in other words, I wasn't at the point where I could accept the fact that I wasn't leading the organization. I had done it for so long.

K: So would you personally have wanted the Third World Women's Alliance to continue?

Cheryl Perry League: Not necessarily. No. I was fine with the integration. It's just that my role changed. So those women who were—I remember when they all started—were all now leading me. And see, again, the only reason why—that would not be an issue for me today. I could care less who leads, but in that time period, you have to appreciate, I'm still in my early, late 20s. You're very vulnerable around, you know, your sense of self. Where you think you are and all those sorts of things. So I pretty much didn't really pay attention to the internal dynamics, the politics with the projects I worked on. And, then, we were getting really involved in our own, if you will Marxist-Leninist Formation, called "Line of March" [?]. You know, and I was basically someone who had been assigned to a lot of the stuff in the Black community. They knew that that's where I was going. And, so, when this stuff started to fold, I was position very well in the African American community in Oakland.

K: Had made connections with people.

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, yeah. It's just completely a subtle question about where I fit into the African American community in Oakland.

K: So some of it---you can correct me if I'm wrong because I'm just hearing it now---but it sounds like one of the consequences then of the political development you were doing with people was they learned how to be leaders and then sort of ended up sort nudging you out of that position. Sort of exercising, basically, what you had taught them.

*followers
become
leaders*

Cheryl Perry League: Right. Right. Keep in mind I'm not advocating that I should have been in leadership. But, simply, I was maintaining probably old methods of organizing. You know, I had not made the transition around what the new requirements were for political work. Know what I'm saying?

K: No, I don't understand.

Cheryl Perry League: In other words, it's one thing when you're just sitting around organizing women of color, doing consciousness-raising. It's another if you're actually positioning yourself to participate in public policy around women's oppression. I said public policy just for clarity, but it's basically participating in the ideological debates around line, political line on women's oppression. It elevated to the actual writing, very involved writing and publishing of documents.

K: Yeah, I heard they had published a lot.

Cheryl Perry League: So, and keep in mind I'm coming from a very grassroots sort of experience and I had not developed the oral and written---I had the oral skills, but I had not the ideological or written skills to participate that way. And so I think it was just a recognition that I'm a helluva an organizer, but I wasn't someone who could lead political debates or sit in a room with five or six other organizations who all had different opinions about women's oppression and me to generate my ideas.

*use this!
great dist.
often organ-
izers + other
types of leaders*

K: I see.

Cheryl Perry League: I think that's what it was.

K: Okay. That makes it clear. So you weren't around when the Alliance Against Women's Oppression folded, so you wouldn't know when that happened?

Cheryl Perry League: Oh, no. I might've been gone by then.

K: Well, one of my questions is why you think the Third World Women's Alliance doesn't exist anymore? Are there other reasons besides its metamorphose into another organization?

Cheryl Perry League: Well, yeah. 'Cause all the women---I guess what happened is that even though there was very sharp differences around the transformation to include white women, there wasn't the base. In other words, stronger members, right, of the Third World Women's Alliance went on with the change.

*base
weakened*

K: Moved on to other organizations?

Cheryl Perry League: I don't know what they did. Again, keep in mind I'm going through some personal stuff around my role now, so a lot of this is not clear. Because, as you can see, I'm more clearer about the Third World Women's Alliance than I am the other one.

K: I guess what do you think about Black feminist organizing today?

Cheryl Perry League: Fine. Yeah, I don't have an issue at all.

K: I mean, do you think it's been effective or do you see it happening around you?

Cheryl Perry League: No, I don't think there's a force. I think, you know, I don't know what women are doing because where I sit now is very different. So, I'm not really in those circles of what folks are doing.

K: Well, those are all my questions. Did you have anything you wanted to add?

Cheryl Perry League: No, not at all. I'd just like to see it when it's all said and done.

[Chit chat about sending parts of dissertation to key people. She agreed to be a reader.]

K: One more question: *Triple Jeopardy* was that just on the east coast or did the west coast---

Cheryl Perry League: We participated in the writing of the articles, but it was produced back east.

K: And you said there---did you have help in leading the west coast organization? Was there a core group around you?

Cheryl Perry League: I did it by myself.